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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 000688

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SUBJECT: JAPAN/AFRICA: JAPANESE EMBOFF DISCUSSES WEST
AFRICA, CHINA

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Classified By: Political M-C Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Chie Kinumaki, an Africa Watcher at Japan's Embassy in Paris, on February 21 discussed efforts to assist 30 Japanese nationals in leaving Guinea; the impasse in Cote d'Ivoire; concerns about China's lack of interest in promoting democracy, human rights, and sound business practices across Africa; and Japan's participation in the recent Africa-France Summit in Cannes (largely ceremonial). Kinumaki also provided details on Japanese diplomatic representation in West Africa. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) We met on February 21 with Chie Kinumaki, one of several Africa Watchers at Japan's Embassy in Paris. Discussion focused on West Africa, which is currently the main area of concern for the Japanese, notably because of the unrest in Guinea and the continuing impasse in Cote d'Ivoire.

Guinea

¶3. (C) Kinumaki said that Japan's main concern in Guinea was consular. The Japanese Embassy had drawn down to essential staff only. Kinumaki said that there were some 30 Japanese nationals present in Guinea and the Embassy's attention has been focused on assisting them and helping them leave. However, of these 30, a small group consists of young Japanese adventurers who went to Guinea to study traditional drumming and percussion techniques. Apparently, according to Kinumaki, there is a devoted group of young musicians in Japan strongly interested in traditional African music. These musicians continue to be a problem for the Japanese Embassy because they say they want to stay in Guinea, do not feel threatened by the unrest, and, in several cases, have nonrefundable tickets they do not want to abandon. Even though they are free to remain, Kinumaki said that their presence was a worry to the Embassy, which viewed itself as partially responsible for their safety.

¶4. (C) On the political side, Kinumaki said the Japanese were concerned that unrest could increase on or after February 23, depending on whether there is an end to the "state of siege," its extension, and the reaction of the unions and opposition.

Situation in Cote d'Ivoire

15. (C) Kinumaki said that Cote d'Ivoire remained at an impasse, with President Gbagbo displaying a fair amount of skill in retaining control, remaining one step ahead of his critics, and avoiding implementation of the peace process. Given the current lack of movement, Kinumaki was not confident that elections would take place in October. Kinumaki said that the French appeared out of ideas and were becoming increasingly frustrated by the high costs of Operation Licorne. Kinumaki believed that French MFA and Elysee officials were also reluctant to press for new initiatives in these last weeks of the Chirac Presidency, not only for fear of provoking Chirac as he leaves office but also for fear of initiating projects that Chirac's successor might not welcome. The French election cycle was thus hampering French thinking on Cote d'Ivoire and probably elsewhere, she observed. Kinumaki predicted a thorough review of France's Africa policy once Chirac, the last French practitioner of the old-school, personalized way of doing business with Africa, leaves the scene.

16. (C) Kinumaki remarked that Operation Licorne had hamstrung France in another way, by giving other concerned parties the impression that France was willing and able to shoulder a substantial part of the international community's burden in Cote d'Ivoire. The French do not want this burden; at the same time, however, they value recognition of their leadership role and fear that reducing or curtailing Operation Licorne could worsen the situation in Cote d'Ivoire and allow others to criticize France for abandoning leadership for selfish reasons.

China

17. (C) Kinumaki referred several times to China's growing

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presence in Africa and the aggressiveness displayed by the Chinese in expanding this presence. Notably, Kinumaki said at several points that the Japanese were relatively less worried about the economic competition the Chinese represented. "What bothers us is the completely unprincipled way the Chinese are building these ties," she said. "When they come bearing huge sums of money, offer assistance unconditionally, and almost deliberately ignore such issues as human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and other similar concepts, they are really appealing to the worst instincts of Africa's leaders," she complained.

18. (C) Kinumaki said that Japan was following China's policies in Africa closely, but she acknowledged that Africa did not rank very high on the list of bilateral Japan-PRC concerns, with North Korea occupying the top spot. She readily emphasized Japan's inability to influence the Chinese on Africa -- "as soon as we start mentioning to them that they should be more responsible partners to Third World countries, they immediately tell us to mind our own business and express outrage that Japan, which once sought to conquer and colonize China, should be giving lectures on good behavior." Kinumaki said that the GOJ had indirectly tried to advise African leaders to beware of China but that these efforts had been largely ineffective in the face of what the Chinese offer, with no strings attached. (See below, para 10, on how pro-Chinese attitudes may have manifested themselves at the Africa-France Summit.)

Africa-France Summit

19. (C) Kinumaki provided a read-out on the February 15-16 Africa-France Summit in Cannes from the Japanese perspective. Former PM Mori headed the delegation, whose Tokyo members included Director (A/S-equivalent) of MOFA's Africa Bureau and a number of staff. Japan's Ambassador to France, his DCM, Kinumaki, and two or three others from Paris also attended. Kinumaki said that Japan's participation in the

Summit was largely ceremonial, consisting of attending the large group meetings, during one of which Mori made a short speech. The Japanese held a brief (5-10 minutes) bilateral meeting with President Chirac, which consisted largely of small talk. The Japanese made a short demarche asking for French support regarding North Korea, with Chirac responding with an unspecific "of course, of course, we support you concerning North Korea."

¶10. (C) Kinumaki said that the Japanese delegation did not do much wheeling-and-dealing with others present at the Summit. Much of the attendees' attention and sentiment were focused on Chirac and the Summit as one of his swan songs. She did note, however, that the French wanted to include as a sub-theme for one of the sessions a discussion on China's activities in Africa but let this drop when a good number of African delegations indicated that they preferred that this not be included as a formal discussion topic.

Japanese Diplomacy in West Africa

¶11. (SBU) Kinumaki said that Japan maintained some two dozen Embassies across Africa, with most of them responsible for two or more countries. Japan's Embassy in Senegal served as the regional hub for West Africa and covered Mauritania, Mali, and Senegal's other immediate neighbors. Abidjan was responsible also for Benin, Togo, Niger, and Burkina Faso. The Embassy in Ghana covered anglophone countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. Japan's Embassy in Nigeria anchored the eastern end of the West Africa region and covered countries to Nigeria's north, east and south. Kinumaki noted that Japan's Embassy in Conakry was an anomaly in that it was responsible only for Guinea.

"Virtual" Embassy Abidjan

¶12. (C) Kinumaki said that Japan's diplomatic presence in Cote d'Ivoire had become unique -- the Embassy left Cote d'Ivoire about a year ago because of the unrest and instability and has been operating in Paris as a "virtual" Embassy since then. Some personnel have been re-assigned elsewhere, but the Ambassador and a small staff, in offices

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located within Japan's Embassy to France, continue to try to function as an Embassy to the five countries to which it is accredited. MOFA has rented apartments for the remaining staff and a clear division of activity has developed between the "African" Embassy and the Paris Embassy -- for example, when there is a Japanese national holiday or other public event, the "African" Embassy will hold its own function separately from whatever the Paris Embassy might organize. Kinumaki indicated that this arrangement had created a bit of tension between the two missions.

¶13. (C) One of the officers from the "African" Embassy travels monthly to Abidjan and perhaps one or two of the other capitals on a rotating basis to check on Japan's facilities, pay local staff, and maintain some semblance of personal contact with host governments. MOFA's personnel and budget sections are not pleased with the continuing presence in Paris of the Abidjan Embassy, which is quite expensive, far from ideal, and no longer the quick fix once envisioned. Kinumaki explained that, in principle, the "African" Embassy is to return to Abidjan once elections take place in Cote d'Ivoire, but no one knows when that will occur, with the October target date looking less and less realistic.

Bio Note

¶14. (C) Chie Kinumaki is not a Class A MOFA diplomat but rather a MOFA specialist who has been at the Japanese Embassy to France since mid-2005. She said that she spent time in Madagascar, which allowed her to work on her French, which is good. Kinumaki is a ready interlocutor who is often more available than her other colleagues who cover Africa. She is

also willing to talk about "in-house" matters that others at the Japanese Embassy may be more reluctant to discuss.

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